

FOREWORD

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is best known for its water resources and environmental work and its construction of facilities on military bases; however, in its long history the Corps has performed many missions, some of which continue to the present and others that reflected the needs of a particular period of our nation's history.

Although not forgotten, but perhaps imperfectly remembered, the Corps' critical role in the development of Washington, D.C., is a fascinating and important chapter in U.S. Army Engineer history. The Corps' role began when the federal government called on the expertise of the few formally educated engineers in the early republic to provide urban services such as a reliable water supply or to contribute to the expansion of the Capitol.

As the small and rudimentary city expanded during and after the Civil War, the requirement for greatly increased engineering services became evident, both for the city's governmental center and for its neighborhoods where residents lived and businesses operated. For almost seventy years, Army Engineer officers supervised the monumental, federal core of the city as the Mall grew, evolved, and became the primary focus for the tributes the nation erected for its heroes. The Office of Public Building and Grounds was at the heart of the transformation of the city's federal center.

At almost the same time, Army Engineers were given a critical role in governing the city where Washingtonians lived and worked. As one of three commissioners who ran the city, the Engineer Commissioners were powerful figures directing public works and providing the expanding public urban infrastructure that a modern city needed as it grew in size and complexity after the Civil War.

And finally, Army Engineers performed their traditional missions in the Washington area by maintaining navigation on the city's rivers and building facilities on its many military installations. But those missions were magnified as the Washington Engineer District literally created new land that became the site of a national airport, monuments, and parks on the banks of the Potomac River.

By the fourth decade of the twentieth century, the Army Engineers' role in the capital began to decline as new federal agencies, such as the National Park Service, created to maintain the

country's natural and man-made monuments, assumed duties formerly performed by the Corps. Three decades later, Washingtonians received more self-rule as elected officials replaced the federally-appointed city government. Only the water resources and military construction roles remain for the Corps, now performed by its Baltimore District.

Army Engineers fulfilled the needs of the time but eventually the needs evolved in new directions. In the process the Corps relinquished its central role in Washington, D.C., proud of its accomplishments and ready to fulfill its remaining duties. This book chronicles their contributions to the city and to the nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. L. Van Antwerp". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

R. L. Van Antwerp

Lieutenant General, US Army

Chief of Engineers